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GENERAL ZELIGOWSKI, A POLISH ADVOCATE OF PAN-SLAVISM

Description

Biographical data on General Lucjan Zeligowski, a member of the Polish National Council who advocates a Slav Alliance. An analysis of his views on the past and future of the Slav nations, particularly on the subject of Polish-Russian relations.

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SUMMARY

General Lucjan Zeligowski, oldest member of the Polish National Council in London, recently attracted wide attention by reiterating his advocacy of a Slav alliance. He sharply criticized the foreign policy of the Government-in-exile as extremely dangerous to Polish interests.

The General, who served for thirty-five years in the Czarist Army, was subsequently a leading figure in the military hierarchy of independent Poland. After years in retirement, in 1935 he became a member of the Polish Parliament, the Sejm, where he fought the totalitarian tendencies of the Smigly-Rydz regime.

Zeligowski for many years has argued the necessity for the Slav peoples to unite against their hereditary enemies, the Germans. He condemns Poland's governing elite, past and present, for having spurned the friendship of the other Slav nations. Although by no means a friend of the Soviet Union, he concedes the impossibility of cultivating a Slav alliance which does not include the Russians.

Moscow publicizes Zeligowski's statements, for they fit the new Pan-Slav program pursued by the USSR since 1941. There is, however, no evidence that the General is being considered as a leader for a pro-Russian Polish group. He is chiefly noteworthy as an outspoken critic of Polish official policy and as a representative of a trend in political thought which Poland may accept.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent Moscow broadcasts have given wide publicity to statements made in London by General Lucjan Zeligowski, oldest member of the Polish National Council. On 31 March 1944, in a secret session of the National Council, General Zeligowski caused an uproar by criticizing the foreign policy of the Polish Government and calling for immediate co-operation with the USSR "and other Slavic peoples." On the same day the General submitted to Professor Grabski, chairman of the National Council, the draft of a radio address to his constituents in Poland. [1] The draft address was not cleared for broadcast;[2] but an appeal from President Raczkiewicz to abandon the proposal failed to prevent Zeligowski from seeing that copies of his intended talk reached the Slav governments and embassies in London, as well as the British and U S Governments.

The aged General's present views are set forth in a letter to the Chairman of the National Council written at the time his broadcast was cancelled. According to the version of this letter broadcast by Moscow, he reiterated his belief that the official Polish policy "is shortsighted, lacks a plan, and has no ideological basis." Poland, he

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1. FBIS, Daily Report, 20 May 1944
2. The text of the appeal has been published since in pro-Russian Polish language papers in the United States. (Cf. Glos Ludowy, Detroit, 8 July 1944).

asserts, is playing into Germany's hands and moving toward a suicidal war with Russia. He demands that Poland take its place in the rebuilding of the world, and the slogan around which he invites all Poles to unite is: Slav Alliance. The object of the present study is to furnish a brief analysis of the background and present importance of this exponent of Pan-Slavism.

II. MILITARY AND POLITICAL CAREER

Lucjan Zeligowski was born 2 October 1865 in the town of Nieswiez, in the Byelorussian area of Poland. Graduated from the military schools at Riga and St. Petersburg, at the age of 20 he entered on a military career in the Russian Imperial Army. During World War I he commanded an infantry regiment. The disintegration of the Imperial Army found him a leader in the "Eastern Corps," which was composed of Poles. The Revolution placed him in obvious danger as a Czarist army officer, but he succeeded in escaping to Poland. There he joined forces with Pilsudski, and in September 1919 took over command of the Lithuanian Byelorussian front.

Late in 1920 Zeligowski attracted world-wide attention by leading the alleged "revolution" which wrested Wilno from the Lithuanians and created the so-called "Independent State of Central Lithuania." For over a year the "rebel" General ruled Central Lithuania as a virtual dictator. Then in March 1922, the maneuver wascompleted when the Polish Sejm ac-

cepted Wilno's request for incorporation into the Polish Republic and in February 1923 Wilno was awarded to Poland by the Conference of Ambassadors. Marshal Pilsudski later admitted that the spontaneous action led by Zeligowski was a result of his own secret orders.[3]

Promoted to full general in 1924, Zeligowski served as War Minister from November 1925 until 5 May 1926. After Pilsudski's coup d'état, he was made Army Inspector and was finally pensioned 31 August 1927. After eight years spent on his modest estate near Wilno, he re-appeared on the political scene in 1935 as Wilno's representative in the Sejm. In the Polish Parliament, made up entirely of Pilsudski supporters, Zeligowski was noteworthy for his independence of expression. An outspoken opponent of those groups favoring a Polish brand of totalitarianism, he made verbal attacks upon the extra-constitutional power of Marshal Smigly-Rydz.[4] His opinions, as expressed in the Sejm, do not class him as a liberal. On some issues, notably the Jewish question, he ranged himself beside the extreme nationalists. His opposition to Germany, however, was consistent. He stressed constantly the necessity for a Slavic orientation in Polish foreign policy.[5]

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3. Cf. Encyklopedja Wojskowa. (Polish Military Encyclopedia), V, 95, Warsaw 1936.
4. New York Times, 19 January 1938
5. Ibid., 21 March 1939

When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, Zeligowski escaped to Paris. There his record of opposition to Smigly-Rydz caused him to be one of the few former supporters of Pilsudski to be given a seat in the Polish National Council.[6]

III. PAN-SLAV CONVICTIONS

Zeligowski's views on the past and future of eastern Europe are set forth in his pamphlet, The Slav Idea,[7] published in 1941. In this treatise he interprets Poland's history as that of a country mistakenly shunning kindred nations while seeking artificial friendships elsewhere. Nothing, he writes, must now prevent the Polish people from recognizing their kinship to other Slav nations. In such unity lie military security, social progress, and cultural advancement.[8]

In Zeligowski's view, the vicissitudes in Polish history can be traced directly or indirectly to German influence and German ambitions. He points out, for instance,

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6. In his first speech in the National Council, Zeligowski urged the creation of a Slavonic Institute. "He has consistently advocated collaboration of all Slav nations." (Cf. Michal Kwiatkowski: Rzad i Rada Narodowa /The Government and the National Council/. London 1942, p. 128).
7. O Idee Slowianska, London 1941, Mildner & Sons.
8. Op. cit. p. 5.

that German bishops' pressure on the Catholic Church caused it to withdraw permission for the use of the Slavonic liturgy of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, thus causing religious schism among the Slav peoples. From that example he proceeds to trace a thousand years of Slav history as a protracted struggle against the Teutonic Drang nach Osten. Russian imperialism appears in his argument as a result of German influence at the Czar's court. Zeligowski calls Communism a German philosophy, surreptitiously imported into Russia. Even the Soviet attacks on Poland in 1939 he considers to have taken place "at the moment which was most opportune for the Germans."[9]

Most of Poland's share of the responsibility for Slav disunity Zeligowski attaches to the gentry, the governing elite. He accuses this elite of confusing the Russian people with their governments, of shunning co-operation with the Ukrainians, and of aiding the Germans to weaken the Czechs and the Baltic peoples.[10] He calls upon the Poles to reject their artificial ties to Greek, Roman, and Western European culture in favor of union with their sister races in a Great Slavia.

The Slav Idea, published shortly before Germany's attack on Russia, criticized Russian ambitions and laid particular emphasis upon the need for Poland to take the

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9. Op. cit., p. 7
10. Op. cit., p. 11

lead in uniting all Slavs. Under the impact of the USSR's successful resistance to the Nazi invasion, Zeligowski appears to have acquired a greater appreciation of Russia's role as the center for a Slav alliance. The role envisioned for Poland, in the General's letter of March 1944, to the Chairman of the National Council, is honorable but not dominant. He warns against schemes of a Western Slav Federation excluding Russia, and still more against secret hopes and plans for eventual war against the Soviets. On this point his letter reads: "By agitating for a Poland within the framework of a Central European Federation or a bloc of Western Slavs, or for a Poland governed according to the Atlantic Charter, but isolated, or else in alliance with the Anglo-Saxon powers, our government either deliberately ignores realities or else indulges in intrigues whose aim cannot be secret... all this is happening at a time when everything is in favor of an alliance of the Slav nations in which Poland would play an important and honorable part. One may like or dislike the march of history, but none of us can stop it."

IV. POLISH AND RUSSIAN REACTIONS

Although many Poles in London respect General Zeligowski for his military record and for his political independence, he has no large following among the emigrés, to most of whom the mere thought of "turning their eyes eastward" carries with it the fear of Soviet-inspired

However, Zeligowski's speech of 31 March impressed some members of the National Council, even if it did not convince them. It was pointed out that the address incorporated some positive recommendations as an alternative to ill-defined hopes for "liberation from the west", hopes which have not been founded upon any concrete Anglo-American actions. According to the observer, Professor Grabski himself conceded that Zeligowski's demands "could not be ruled out of court." 13

Moscow long has viewed the General's Pan-Slav doctrines with suspicion. He by no means can be considered a friend of Soviet Russia, having once, in 1928, carried his opposition to Bolshevism so far as publicly to advocate a Polish attack upon Russia.14 Only a few weeks before Russian propaganda seized upon Zeligowski's statement of 31 March, War and the Working Class attacked his book, Forgotten Truths. The review, written by Justus Paleckis, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, asserts: "To Zeligowski the Slav idea is a means of justifying the fantastic imperialist schemes for the extension of the Polish frontiers in the East." 15

Despite this attack and notwithstanding General Zeligowski's anti-Soviet record, the USSR has made full use

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13. Polish-Jewish Observer, London, 7 April 1944.
14. Cf. Bolshaya Sovietskaya Entsiklopedya, Moscow, 1932, XXV, 83.
15. CID 75886 R.

social upheavals in Poland. There is a noticeable tendency to point out the General's age, and among the less discreet, to refer to his statements simply as "senile blabber." At the other extreme, however, is a group which has given wide dissemination to Zeligowski's letter to the Chairman of the National Council. This is the Polish Slav Committee, established in London in March 1944 and led by Wilanowski, a former lawyer from Lodz, and Dr. Jan Jagodzinski of London University.[11] It is described in Polish government circles as pro-Russian, following the established policy lines of similar Pan-Slav organizations in Great Britain and the United States. Although Zeligowski has refused to join the Committee, he is reported to be in contact with some of its members.

The negative reaction to Zeligowski's views in Polish official quarters is matched by reports of opposition to Pan-Slavism on the part of some factions within occupied Poland. A representative of the pro-Government Underground, upon being asked in London what was the attitude of Poles toward the Slav alliance, replied: "There is no such movement in Poland." He went on to dismiss any thought of close co-operation with Russia, saying: "There is no possibility of such a federation. Because of the disproportion of strength, this would mean the end of our independence." [12]

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11. Cf. Ceskoslovensko, No. 10, 11 March 1944; New York Times, 14 March 1944.
12. Cf. Polska Agencja Telegraficzna, No. 365, 23 May 1944.

of his recent pronouncements for their effect in Polish official circles. In May 1944, War and the Working Class published a note praising the General for "learning the lessons of history" and defending him against Polish reactionaries. His past attitude is declared irrelevant in view of the "positive significance" of his recent statement.[16] Moscow's utterances, however, indicate no tendency to regard Zeligowski as a possible leader of Pro-Russian thought among Poles in London. He is not known to have been mentioned by either side in any plans for the improvement of Polish-Russian relations. He is noteworthy for his criticism of past and present Polish official policies and his plea for acceptance by the Poles of new trends in, and a different direction to, their political thinking.

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16. Moscow wire, #2011, 6 June 1944.